

State Notes

TOPICS OF LEGISLATIVE INTEREST

July/August 2008



Alternative Teacher Certification Programs By Debra Hollon, Fiscal Analyst

Most teachers have followed the same path to certification -- completion of an approved teacher preparation program and progression through the various levels of certification. In some instances, however, a school district cannot find an individual with these qualifications to fill a vacant teaching position or an individual with a degree in something other than education is willing to teach, but not willing to return to college to obtain another degree. Situations such as these have led to the development of alternative teaching certification programs in order to bring supply and demand closer together.

Typical Certification Process and Requirements

There are two main types of teaching certificates in Michigan: provisional and professional. The provisional certificate is the initial designation and is intended to be renewed as the individual progresses and completes the requirements for the professional certificate. Some individuals move directly from the initial provisional certificate to the professional certificate. Table 1 below outlines the requirements of each certificate. Other certificates exist for specialty areas, but these two general certificates will be the focus of this discussion.

Table 1

Michigan Teaching Certificates		
Certificate	Educational/Testing Requirements	Validity Period
Provisional Certificate	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Completion of an approved teacher preparation program• Passage of the Michigan Test for Teacher Certification	Six years
Provisional Certificate - First Renewal	Nine semester hours of classwork or completion of a Master's degree (in addition to continuing education requirements)	Three years
Provisional Certificate - Second Renewal	18 total semester hours of classwork or completion of a Master's degree (in addition to continuing education requirements)	Three years
Professional Certificate	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• 18 total semester hours of classwork or completion of a Master's degree (in addition to continuing education requirements)• Three years' teaching experience at the grade level of the provisional certificate• Courses in the teaching of reading or reading methods – six semester hours for elementary or three semester hours for secondary	Five years

Source: Michigan Department of Education

An individual having difficulty meeting the requirements for renewal of the provisional certificate may qualify for a two-year extension if he or she is sponsored by a Michigan school, has one year of satisfactory teaching experience, and is on a planned program to complete the requirements. In addition, an individual at the end of the second renewal certificate who does not meet the teaching qualifications for the professional certificate may apply for a third renewal if he or she is sponsored by a Michigan school and has completed the academic requirements of the professional certificate.



Critical Teaching Disciplines

A shortage of teachers in certain fields or geographic areas is a nationwide problem. Many school districts find it difficult to fill vacancies in math or the sciences. If these districts are in rural areas or inner cities, that difficulty is magnified. In this State, the Michigan Department of Education identifies critical teacher shortage areas on an annual basis. For the 2007-2008 school year, these critical areas include math, the sciences, special education, vocational education, foreign languages, and some specialty areas (such as business services).

Several methods have been implemented in an effort to fill shortages in these areas. Some provide incentives such as scholarships, educational loan repayments, or employment of retired teachers. Alternative teacher certification programs, however, focus on individuals with a degree or background in the specific subject area who wish to become teachers, but who do not wish to return to school to obtain a degree in education.

Alternative Routes to Certification

There are three main alternative route to certification programs in Michigan: Central Michigan University, Wayne State University, and the Ferris State University/Troops to Teachers program. Table 2 compares the major aspects of each. Both Central Michigan University and Wayne State University receive \$100,000 in State funding in the Department of Education's budget for their programs.

The main focus of Central Michigan University's Alternative Route to Certification (ARC) Program is on preparing math, science, and industrial education teachers for rural school districts. Individuals entering the program must have a Bachelor's degree in a "teachable" major -- math, science, industrial education, foreign languages, etc. Individuals who commit to an internship in a rural school district are given priority in admission. The ARC Program is designed to be completed in one calendar year and includes both education coursework and the rural teaching internship. The success rate from January 2004 through February 2008 is 56.0% (53 completers of 95 enrolled).

Wayne State University's Pathways Alternative Route to Certification Program focuses upon special education and bilingual education for urban school districts in the Detroit area. This program leads to a Master's degree, not just eligibility for certification. As a result, it takes longer to complete this program compared with the others. In addition, students must maintain a 3.0 grade point average (GPA) to continue in the program. The Pathways program includes a combination of coursework delivery methods: on-line, in a school building, and in a university building. The success rate for the Pathways program for 2005 to 2008 is 40.0% (32 completers of 81 enrolled). Because this is a Master's degree program, its success rate should not be compared directly to that of the other two programs in this discussion.

The newest of the alternative route to certification programs is the Ferris State University/Troops to Teachers collaboration. Troops to Teachers is a Federal program developed to place qualified active duty personnel and reservists into teaching positions. The focus of the program is on finding special education, bilingual education, math, science, and industrial education teachers



for high-need, low-income school districts in rural and urban settings. The coursework for the program is provided on-line and includes a full academic year of interning. The Ferris State University/Troops to Teachers program is in the second year of a three-year evaluation period by the Michigan Department of Education.

Table 2

Comparison of Alternative Certification Programs			
Program	Focus	Master's Degree/ Path to Certification	Admission Requirements
Central Michigan University	Rural districts; science, math, industrial education	Path to certification	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Bachelor's degree with major in certain areas with a 2.7 GPA; • Passage of Michigan Basic Skills Test; • Passage of subject area test; • No requirement for acceptance to College of Graduate Studies; • Priority for admission given to those willing to intern in a rural school district.
Wayne State University	Detroit Public Schools, Highland Park School District, Pontiac School District; Special education and bilingual education	Master's degree	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Acceptance into College of Graduate Studies; • Bachelor's degree with a 2.75 GPA (and maintenance of a 3.0 GPA to stay in the program); • Passage of Basic Skills Test prior to student teaching; • Passage of subject area test prior to recommendation for certification.
Ferris State University/Troops to Teachers	High-need, low-income schools in rural and urban districts; special education, bilingual education, science, math, industrial education	Path to certification	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Acceptance into the Department of Education and Human Services Graduate program; • Bachelor's degree with major in certain areas; • Passage of Michigan Basic Skills Test; • Passage of subject area test.

Source: Michigan Department of Education; university websites

Noncertified Teachers

Despite efforts to certify individuals as teachers, there are times when school districts cannot find qualified, certified teachers to fill vacant positions. Under very specific circumstances, school districts may hire noncertified, nonendorsed teachers. These circumstances include situations in which the district is unable to hire a certified teacher or the noncertified person is enrolled in a teacher preparation program.

To be hired, the noncertified individual must have a Bachelor's degree with a major in or a Master's degree in the subject area he or she will teach and have not less than two years of

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work experience in the field of specialization. (Foreign language teachers are exempt from the work experience requirement.) If the person will be hired for more than one year, he or she must pass the Basic Skills Test and subject area test.

Conclusion

As school districts see their budgets being squeezed ever tighter and consider not filling vacancies or even laying off teachers, it may seem as though there would be no need for alternative teacher certification programs, and that the typical route to certification of teacher preparation programs would supply the number of teachers needed. However, that is not the case. High-need school districts in rural and urban areas still have difficulty recruiting and retaining teachers and it is those areas that depend on the alternative certification programs to help fill those needs.